

Research Report 1339

**DEVELOPMENT OF PERFORMANCE-BASED
ASSESSMENT CENTERS FOR ADMISSIONS
OFFICERS AT THE U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY**

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LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT TECHNICAL AREA

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centers for both positions. These assessment centers were to be developmental in nature, featuring assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of incoming officers on behavioral dimensions important to success in their new positions, followed by individualized programs of remedial training.

Through discussions with experienced admissions officers and their supervisors, the important behavioral dimensions of the admissions officer positions were identified. Job simulations were then developed to tap these dimensions. Four simulations were developed for Admissions Officers proper: an in-basket exercise, a performance counseling interview, an oral presentation, and a telephone conversation exercise. Two simulations were developed for the Project Outreach Officers: an in-basket exercise and an oral presentation. Associated workbooks and videotapes for assessor training were also developed.

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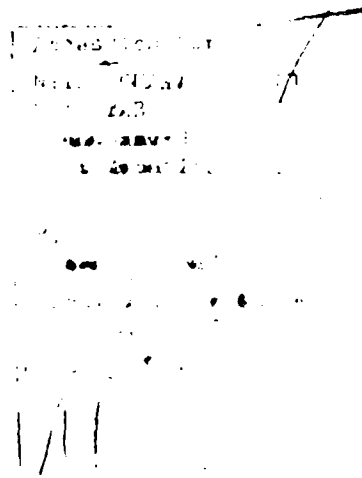
FOREWORD

The training and performance of admissions officers is considered a critical management area within the Office of Director of Admissions at the U.S. Military Academy. Admissions Officers perform a complex set of duties, critical to the success of the Military Academy, which range from evaluating candidate application files to assisting members of Congress on Academy matters. The training program necessary to prepare these officers to assume duties of such diversity and complexity must itself be broad in scope and demanding in nature. To that end, performance-based assessment for developmental training was proposed as a supplement to the formal training program. The purpose of this assessment process would be to identify dimensions of performance necessary for effectiveness as an admissions officer, to evaluate those dimensions in new admissions officers, and to provide developmental feedback on dimensions assessed as being in need of improvement.

Two admissions officer assessment centers were developed to serve that purpose--one for Admissions Officers proper and one for Project Outreach Officers who advise minority students on career planning matters.

The assessment centers consist of behavioral exercises designed to simulate common duty situations for each of the two admissions officer positions. Assistance in the development of these programs is part of a continuing effort by the Army Research Institute to provide technical advisory service to the Army. This report will be of specific interest to the Office of the Director of Admissions and of general interest to any Army agency considering the use of performance-based assessment.


EDGAR M. JOHNSON
Technical Director



DEVELOPMENT OF PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT CENTERS FOR ADMISSIONS OFFICERS
AT THE U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Requirement:

To develop two performance-based assessment programs designed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of two categories of admissions officers on dimensions of performance important to success in their respective job positions, and to provide individualized programs of developmental training to remediate weaknesses identified in the assessment process.

Procedure:

Two separate categories of admissions officers are distinguishable at West Point--Admissions Officers proper and Project Outreach Officers, whose function is to assist minority students with career planning. The development of assessment programs for both positions began with the selection, through a consensus of job experts, of the dimensions of admissions officer performance that should be assessed. Next, job simulations were designed for each position, so as to elicit behavior in each of the selected dimensions. These simulations were pre-tested by having experienced admissions officers perform in them. Then, videotapes and workbooks were developed for assessor training and for administration of the assessment centers. Finally, an assessment center for each type of admissions officer was conducted and followed by an individualized feedback session in which developmental training was recommended.

Findings:

Thirteen dimensions were selected to be assessed in both admissions officer assessment centers. They were oral communication, oral presentation, written communication, influencing others, initiative, sensitivity, planning and organizing, delegation, administrative control, problem analysis, judgment, decisiveness, and technical competence. To assess these dimensions, four exercises (scenarios) were developed for Admissions Officers proper: An in-basket exercise, a performance counseling interview, an oral presentation, and a telephone conversation exercise. Two exercises were developed for Project Outreach Officers: an in-basket exercise and an oral presentation. Videotapes of participants performing in these exercises were filmed to be aids in assessor training and workbooks to assist assessors in observing and evaluating behavior in each exercise were designed.

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Utilization of Findings:

Both the Admissions Officer Assessment Program and the Project Outreach Officer Program were implemented at West Point in the Fall of 1981. Both centers will be conducted again in the Summer of 1982.

DEVELOPMENT OF PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT CENTERS FOR ADMISSIONS OFFICERS
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DEVELOPMENT OF PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT CENTERS FOR ADMISSIONS OFFICERS AT THE U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY

INTRODUCTION

A steady decline in the population of college-bound youth in the United States has created a fiercely competitive market among colleges and universities for qualified students. In such an environment, the competence of admissions office representatives at identifying and recruiting applicants of suitable quality for their institutions becomes crucial and means the difference between accomplishing class composition goals and sacrificing standards to achieve proper class size. This is especially true for the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, as well as for the other service academies. Because of their special admission requirements, they are highly dependent upon a relatively small segment of the total college-bound population. This segment annually consists of some of the most highly recruited students in the nation. Consequently, the effectiveness of the service academy admissions officers is a critical determinant of the ability of their academies to meet their congressionally mandated recruitment goals.

Problems in Admissions Officer Training

High-pressure competition for what may be described as the elite ranks of the nation's college-bound students handicaps the service academies relative to civilian institutions in several respects. One of the most limiting handicaps is that vital admissions functions are carried out by military officers who serve the standard three to four year tour of duty assigned as admissions officers. Not surprisingly, their prior career assignments have provided only the most general preparation for the highly specialized duties with the admissions offices. An additional handicap is that annual turnover of admissions officers may be as high as 33%, a severe loss of critical experience to any organization.

At West Point, each Admissions Officer (AO) is responsible for the evaluation and application file management of approximately 2,000 candidates from a designated geographic region which may contain five or more states. From this area the AO selects, trains, and manages his field force--a group of Army Reserve officers, half or more of whom will probably be senior to him in rank, who assist in the identification, recruitment, and processing of candidates applying to West Point in their home regions. Additionally, the AO interacts with the 70 or so members of Congress from his geographic area concerning admissions-related requirements and activities. The AO also represents West Point in various public relations efforts that include speaking engagements with candidates, parents, educators, and civic leaders, as well as West Point societies in their regions.

Typically, the officers who assume these critical duties arrive at the Academy only two to three months in advance of the date at which they assume complete responsibility for representing West Point officially to the public. Consequently, only a brief period of training is afforded new AOs and this

provides only basic technical knowledge and just the briefest familiarity with Academy programs. Furthermore, at the time of the assessment center inception, there was no formal method established to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program nor AO performance at the completion of training.

Problems in Project Outreach Officer Training

Another class of admissions officers at West Point, Project Outreach Officers (POs), interact with minority students at the eighth through the twelfth grade levels. These officers travel specific territories encouraging minority students to plan high school study programs that emphasize math and science in order to provide greater opportunities to attend the college of their choice (including West Point). PO duties include speaking to students, parents, and educators in small and large groups, acting in a sense as a salesperson, not only for West Point, but for minority student early career planning and preparation as a valuable strategy for success.

All Project Outreach Officers are minority Lieutenants with only two to five years of Army experience (as compared to AOs with eight to twelve years including graduate school). Since each PO serves only one year, there is 100% turnover and a corresponding requirement to train a new cohort of POs every year. Furthermore, with the exception of after-action reports filed by the departing POs, there is little or no transfer of outreach officer experience from one cohort to the next.

The problems associated with preparing this group to assume its duties are compounded by the relative youth and professional inexperience of the POs, but are much the same as for AOs. For one thing, there is little time to train them since they arrive at West Point even closer than do the AOs to their initial departure dates for the field. In addition, a major requirement of their training is that they must fully understand their mission and the means by which they can accomplish it. And most importantly, the highest priority is attached to representing the institution to the highest standards of knowledge and performance possible, and they must be fully evaluated, apprised of their weaknesses, and provided with developmental guidance prior to their departures as official institutional representatives.

In sum, given the highly competitive market in which admissions officers of both types operate and the associated disadvantages with which they enter the competition for high quality college students, their initial training must be efficiently planned and effectively conducted, providing individual officers with timely developmental guidance to enable them to become the best possible admissions officers in the shortest period of time. To meet these needs, the Office of Director of Admissions decided to implement a full scale performance-based assessment program to assess and develop in new AOs and POs the skills necessary for success in their jobs.

Outline of Report

This report describes the development of the two assessment center programs for the Office of Director of Admissions at West Point--the Admissions Officer Assessment Center and the Project Outreach Officer Assessment Center. The first section presents a brief history of performance-based assessment centers and describes the elements of a standard assessment center. The second section discusses the selection of the particular behavioral dimensions that were measured in the admissions officer assessment centers. The third section covers the development of the job simulations used in the centers and the design of the assessor training materials.

THE ASSESSMENT CENTER METHOD

In this section, a brief history of performance-based assessment is presented and the components of standard assessment centers are described. Also described is a particular type of assessment center, the developmental center, of which the admissions officer assessment centers are examples.

History of Performance-Based Assessment

Performance-based assessment is a method of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of individuals for a particular job position. It involves observing and rating individuals as they perform in job-simulation exercises specially designed to present settings and pose problems that an incumbent encounters as he performs the duties of the position. From these assessments of performance in job samples, predictions are made about performance in the real job.

The earliest reported use of performance-based assessment was by German military psychologists during the World War I era who used behavior in complex realistic situations to evaluate candidates for military command positions. Their procedures were adopted by the British in World War II and modified by them to select candidates into their officer corps (Huck, 1977). Favorable results with the technique obtained by the British led soon after to the establishment of the first performance-based assessment center in the United States--the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Assessment Center to select guerilla fighters and espionage agents (OSS, 1946). Candidates for the OSS were put through a series of exercises designed to simulate situations which they would face when operating in the field. Simulations with evocative names such as the Map Memory Test and the Interrogation Test put the candidate into realistic situations that tested his ability to rapidly memorize route maps and to conduct interrogations of prisoners of war (MacKinnon, 1977).

After the war, the assessment center method fell into disuse in the United States although the British continued to select their officers in that manner. It was resurrected, however, in the mid-1950s at the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T), where it was used in a research project to predict long-term success of new managers in its system. The results of this research showed that assessment center evaluations were accurate predictors of career progress within AT&T (Bray, Campbell, and Grant, 1974).

The results of the AT&T study established that performance-based assessment could be a valid method of prediction. It soon became widespread throughout business and industry as an aid to decision-making about issues of selection, promotion, and developmental training. To date over 2,000 companies and government organizations have made use of performance-based assessment techniques. These include large corporations such as General Electric, General Motors, International Business Machines, Sears Roebuck and Company, Standard Oil of Ohio and government organizations such as the US Air Force and the US Army.

Standard Assessment Center Method

A typical assessment center consists of six participants working either alone or in a group through five or six exercises designed to simulate problems or activities common to the position for which they are being evaluated. These simulations may range from an in-basket exercise, in which the participant works alone through a stack of memoranda and correspondence that has accumulated on the desk of a hypothesized predecessor, to a group discussion exercise in which as many as six participants interact over a particular issue or a set of problems needing resolution.

As the exercises unfold, the participants are observed by a team of two to three assessors with one assessor usually rating one participant in the single-individual exercises and as many as three participants in the group exercises. Each participant is observed by a different assessor in each exercise so that all assessors eventually observe all participants in at least one exercise over the course of the entire assessment center.

The assessors are usually chosen because of their special knowledge of the requirements of the job position to be filled. Generally, they have served in that position earlier in their careers and, later, after promotion to the next level, have supervised incumbents of the position in question.

Depending upon the number of exercises to be observed, one or two days may be required to complete the assessment center. The assessors are trained to record all the significant behaviors that the participants display during the exercises. When the exercises are complete, the assessors classify each discrete behavior into one of a set of more comprehensive behavioral dimensions, each of which has been determined in advance to be an important contributor to success in the target position.

Each participant is then rated on the behavioral dimensions displayed in each exercise by the assessor who personally viewed the participant's performance in that exercise. The ratings are assigned according to standards held in common by all assessors--standards keyed to acceptable levels of performance in each dimension of the job. All assessors then participate in an integration meeting to share with the other assessors their ratings of each participant and the recorded behavioral evidence that supports them. The goal of the integration session is to achieve group consensus so that final ratings can be assigned.

Next, a comprehensive report is prepared on each participant detailing his/her rating profile across all dimensions. This profile, along with a global evaluation of overall suitability for the position, is used to predict the likelihood of success in the target position. The participant is usually apprised of the results of the assessment in a feedback interview.

The Developmental Assessment Center

Most assessment centers in the past have been conducted to identify the most highly qualified individuals from among a pool of candidates to be hired or promoted. However, another use for performance-based assessment which is increasing in popularity is developmental training. Diagnostic feedback to the incumbent on his/her strengths and weaknesses for the current job enables the incumbent and his/her management to select training programs designed to remediate weaknesses and improve current performance. The admissions officer assessment centers to be described in this report are of this developmental variety.

SELECTION OF DIMENSIONS

The behavioral dimensions of the AO and PO positions were determined by an informal job analysis. Since the number of current incumbents and supervisors of those positions is small, and most were available for discussions about position requirements, the dimensions to be assessed were arrived at through a consensus agreement of the incumbents and their supervisors, the Director, and the Associate Director of Admissions.

The dimension discussions revealed that 13 basic dimensions were judged to be important for effective performance of admissions officers of both types and could be observed as overt job-related behaviors and thus open to evaluation within an assessment center. The dimensions selected were the same 13 that were identified as critical ones in a job analysis of the Army Second Lieutenant position performed during the development of the Leadership Assessment Program (Rogers et al., 1982), a performance-based assessment center for the evaluation of leadership skills. Those same dimensions were judged by admissions experts to be important to successful performance in the positions of both AO and PO. The dimensions and their definitions are shown in Table 1.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

After the selection of the 13 behavioral dimensions to be assessed, job simulation exercises were designed to elicit relevant behavior and an assessor training program with associated materials was developed. A pre-test of the exercises was conducted using experienced admissions officers as participants and modifications to the exercises were made based upon the outcome of that test.

Design of Exercises for the AO Assessment Center

To assess incoming AOs on the dimensions important for success in their new job, four exercises, each based on a situation common to the AO job position, were designed: (1) an In-Basket centering on administrative tasks

Table 1
Definitions of Dimensions Assessed

Dimension	Definition
<u>Technical Competence:</u>	Level of understanding and ability to use technical/professional information.
<u>Oral Communication Skill:</u>	Effective expression in individual or group situations (includes gestures and nonverbal communication).
<u>Written Communication Skill:</u>	Clear expression of ideas in writing and in good grammatical form.
<u>Oral Presentation Skill:</u>	Effective expression when presenting ideas or tasks to an individual or to a group when given time for preparation (includes gestures and nonverbal communication).
<u>Influence:</u>	Utilization of appropriate interpersonal styles and methods in guiding individuals (subordinates, peers, superiors) or groups toward task accomplishment.
<u>Initiative:</u>	Active attempts to influence events to achieve goals; self-starting rather than passive acceptance. Taking action to achieve goals beyond those called for; originating action.
<u>Sensitivity:</u>	Actions that indicate a consideration for the feelings and needs of others (includes consideration for the needs of West Point as an organization).
<u>Planning and Organizing:</u>	Establishing a course of action for self and/or others to accomplish a specific goal; planning proper assignments of personnel and appropriate allocation of resources.
<u>Delegation:</u>	Utilizing subordinates effectively. Allocating decision-making and other responsibilities to the appropriate subordinates.
<u>Administrative Control:</u>	Establishing procedures to monitor and/or regulate processes, tasks, or activities of subordinates, and job activities and responsibilities. Taking action to monitor the results of delegated assignments or projects.
<u>Problem Analysis:</u>	Identifying problems, securing relevant information, relating data from different sources and identifying possible causes of problems.
<u>Judgment:</u>	Developing alternative courses of action and making decisions which are based on logical assumptions and which reflect factual information.
<u>Decisiveness:</u>	Readiness to make decisions, render judgments, take action, or commit oneself.

and candidate file evaluation; (2) a Field Force Meeting--counseling a recruiting field force Liaison Officer whose performance has recently deteriorated; (3) a By-Invite Presentation--a formal oral presentation focusing on life at West Point and requirements for admission followed by a question and answer period with a live audience; (4) and a Hostile Candidate Patron Telephone Conversation--explaining to an angry parent why his son was refused admission to West Point.

Each of the exercises was designed to simulate a recurrent situation in the professional activities of West Point AOs. Each simulation provides multiple opportunities for participants to display behaviors in the important AO dimensions, especially Technical Competence which was heavily tapped by each exercise. A list of AO dimensions and the exercises which test them is given in Table 2.

Design of Exercises for the PO Assessment Center

Also shown in Table 2 are the dimensions by exercise for the PO Assessment Center. Since the job experts from the Office of Admissions had judged success in the PO position to depend upon the same basic dimensions as for the AO position, and since many of the specific duties of the PO are similar to those of the AO, the two exercises chosen for the PO assessment center were similar to those chosen for the AOs--an in-basket and an oral presentation.

The In-Basket for POs resembles that for AOs (although for the most part the specific content is different) in that it calls for dealing with a collection of letters and memoranda as well as evaluation of candidate files. The oral presentation exercise, named the Junior High Presentation, involves planning and delivering a persuasive speech to a live audience and then responding to questions from the audience after the formal presentation.

Pre-Test of the Exercises

In order to provide a trial run for the newly designed AO exercises and, at the same time, to film a participant in action for use in assessor training, an experienced AO was videotaped while performing the assessment center exercises. The outcome of this trial was that all exercises were judged to be ready for use with the exception of the In-Basket.

The In-Basket was found to be the most difficult exercise to evaluate. It was designed primarily to assess organizational and analytic skills. It is composed of a series of documents which present six embedded problem situations requiring the participant to recognize all related documents and take action to resolve the problems they pose. The difficulty in designing and evaluating the exercise stems from the manner in which AOs conduct their file review and evaluation. Although there are organizational guidelines to follow, a multiplicity of perspectives exists from which to approach common admissions problems. The pre-test suggested that the key design problem in the In-Basket Exercise was that of creating situations that could be resolved by only a limited number of appropriate solutions--ones clearly

Table 2
Dimensions Assessed by Exercise

Dimension	AO Exercises				PO Exercises	
	In-Basket	Field Force Meeting	By-Invite Presentation	Hostile Candidate Patron	In-Basket	Junior High Presentation
Technical Competence	X	X	X	X	X	X
Oral Communication		X	X	X		X
Written Communication	X				X	
Oral Presentation			X			X
Influence		X		X		
Initiative	X	X		X	X	
Sensitivity	X	X	X	X	X	X
Planning and Organizing	X	X	X		X	X
Delegation	X	X			X	
Administrative Control	X	X			X	
Problem Analysis	X	X		X	X	
Judgment	X	X	X	X	X	X
Decisiveness	X			X	X	

defined by law, policy, and rules from which there could be little deviation. The In-Basket was redesigned to this end, although the subjectivity inherent in certain problem situations could not be totally eliminated.

Assessor Training

The assessor teams for both the AO and the PO Assessment Centers consisted of four experienced admissions officers who were given extensive practice in observing, recording, classifying, and evaluating behavior according to agreed upon standards of admissions officer performance. Training involved approximately two and one-half days of self-study followed by approximately 40 hours of classroom study and practice.

Self-study consisted of readings and self-paced practice exercises. It was accomplished with the aid of the Assessor Training Guide from the Leadership Assessment Program (LAP). This guide was expressly designed for self-study. It presents lessons in the recognition and classification of behavior on the very same dimensions assessed by the AO assessment center (Rogers et al., 1982). Classroom training was provided periodically over the course of several weeks, with sessions of two to four hours devoted to assessment center orientations using LAP exercise materials (e.g., LAP In-Basket materials, LAP Counseling Simulation Exercise videotape and workbook) because they were immediately available.

The self-study and the series of orientation lectures were preliminary to a formal three-day classroom training program held two weeks prior to the AO Assessment Center. The classroom sessions provided instruction and practice in observing and recording behavior from videotapes of the AO exercises, classifying it by dimension, and rating it according to mutually agreed upon standards of successful AO performance. Assessors were also given practice with integration meetings and preparing summary reports on the performance of participants. The intensive nature of the training insured that all assessors were calibrated to a set of common rating standards--the established behavioral skill levels to be expected of an experienced admissions officer.

Implementation of the AO Assessment Center

Actual implementation of the AO Assessment Center required two days in September 1981. Three new admissions officers and one with one year of experience were evaluated by the four assessors. Assessments were accomplished on a one-to-one basis for which each assessor was the sole observer of a different participant in each of the four exercises.

Immediately following the assessment center, the assessors gathered for integration meetings on each participant. In these meetings, discussions were held and consensus was reached regarding the performance of the participant on each dimension of the AO job.

Based on that consensus each assessor prepared a written report on one participant. For convenience, it was decided that that participant would be the one whose In-Basket a given assessor has personally scored. These reports

formed the basis of feedback to the participant by the Associate Director of Admissions who also recommended an individualized program of development for weaknesses identified during assessment. Remedial training for deficiencies in the "Technical Competence" dimension was drawn from the policies, regulations, and in-house operating procedures of the Admissions Office. Suggestions for developmental activities to improve skills in each of the remaining 12 dimensions were taken from the Assessor Training Guide of the LAP, as well as selected programs offered at West Point and a reference library assembled by the Office of Admissions.

Implementation of the PO Assessment Center

Two weeks after the AO Assessment Center was completed the PO Assessment Center was conducted. The assessor team was composed of three admissions officers who had been through the assessor training for the AO Assessment Center and one new assessor (the AO of one year's experience who had been a participant in the AO Assessment Center). The new assessor was given a period of individualized instruction and then joined the experienced assessors in a one and one-half day session to become familiar with the new exercises of the PO Assessment Center.

Eight POs went through the two exercises of the PO assessment center in one day. Integration and report writing required an additional two days. Feedback was provided and developmental programs were assigned by an officer from the assessor team whose duties included supervising the POs in their regular assignments. Developmental training suggestions were taken from the same sources as were used for AO development.

Evaluations of the Assessment Centers

Opinions about the value of the Admissions Officer Assessment Center were solicited from three perspectives--participants, assessors, and the Admissions Office leadership. Participants and assessors reported that they considered the assessment center to have been a valuable experience, personally and professionally.

The Admissions Office leadership, which has direct supervision over the AOs and POs, indicated that the new officers in both categories performed better during their first six months on the job than their predecessors, who had not had the benefit of an assessment center, had performed in previous years. The major criticism leveled at the assessment center process was the large amount of time required to plan, develop, and refine the simulations, and then train for and conduct the centers. Time costs not withstanding, the consensus of the respondents was that the program made a valuable contribution to admissions officer training. It was recognized that, with the costs of development already met, when the assessment centers are repeated in subsequent years, the time investments required for them will be greatly reduced.

FINAL ADMISSIONS OFFICER ASSESSMENT CENTER PROGRAM

This section lists and describes all the components of the Admissions Officer Assessment Center, consisting of four exercises, four workbooks, and four videotapes.

Exercises

In-Basket Exercise. The participant is asked to handle a set of 39 letters, memos, and admissions application information centering on both routine and unique administrative tasks and candidate file evaluations. This information requires that he/she analyze problems, make decisions, delegate responsibilities, and plan, organize, and schedule activities based upon it.

Situation: The participant assumes the role of an admissions officer with recruiting/candidate evaluation responsibility for a particular geographic region. He/she is required to deal with a full in-basket of information which has accumulated during an extended absence from the office. The participant must complete his/her actions on the materials within 120 minutes and must do so while working alone without contact with colleagues.

Field Force Meeting Exercise. The participant must interact on a one-to-one basis with an associate in a performance counseling interview.

Situation: Acting as an admissions officer, the participant must meet with a liaison officer (role player) from his/her field force whose performance in locating and helping to recruit candidates in the geographic area has consistently declined over the last two years. Background data on the liaison officer supplied to the participant offers clues to the causes of the decline in performance. In this exercise, the participant must plan and conduct a performance counseling interview that will uncover the problems leading to the decline and establish solutions to be mutually agreed upon. Forty-five minutes are given to the participant to prepare for the meeting and 60 minutes are allowed for the face-to-face meeting with the liaison officer.

By-Invite Presentation. The participant plans and delivers an oral presentation to a live audience and responds to a standard set of questions from the floor.

Situation: The participant, in his/her role as admissions officer, makes an oral presentation at a by-invitation-only "Get to Know West Point" night at a high school in his/her area of responsibility. The audience consists of candidates and their parents and teachers. The participant is given 60 minutes to prepare remarks, 15 minutes to make the presentation, and then must remain available for a 30-minute question and answer period with the audience during which he/she must field questions probing West Point policy and programs on controversial issues.

Hostile Candidate Patron Exercise. The participant must conduct a telephone conversation with an angry parent of a candidate who was refused admission.

Situation: The participant has received a letter from an angry father who contests the finding of the admissions committee that his son is not qualified for admission. The participant must place a phone call to the father, defend the committee's decision, and attempt to defuse the father's hostility toward West Point.

Workbooks

There is a workbook associated with each of the four exercises. Each workbook lists the dimensions to be assessed through that exercise and provides the assessor with a range of behaviors/answers which are examples of acceptable or unacceptable performance on those dimensions.

Videotapes

In-Basket Interview (30 minutes). An assessee who has just participated in the In-Basket Exercise is shown being interviewed by the assessor who will score the in-basket. The assessor has just completed a brief scan of the in-basket materials and is asking questions aimed at clarifying his understanding of the decisions and actions taken by the assessee and the thought processes behind them.

Field Force Meeting (31 minutes). An assessee is shown conducting a counseling session with a field force member.

By-Invite Presentation (35 minutes). An assessee is shown giving a formal presentation to a small audience. A question and answer period follows.

Hostile Candidate Patron Phone Call (25 minutes). An assessee is shown in a split screen conversation with a hostile parent.

FINAL PROJECT OUTREACH OFFICER ASSESSMENT CENTER PROGRAM

This section lists materials specific to the Project Outreach Officer Assessment Center. There are two exercises and two workbooks. All materials used for AO assessor training were used once again for the PO center. Exercises and the associated workbooks for the PO Assessment Center are listed below:

Exercises

In-Basket Exercise. The participant is required to handle letters, memos, and admissions application information involving routine and unique administrative tasks and candidate file evaluations. This information requires that the participant analyze problems, make decisions, and plan, organize, and schedule activities based upon it.

Situation: The participant is acting in the role of a Project Outreach Officer responsible for a particular geographic area. He/she is required to deal with a full in-basket of information which has accumulated during an extended absence from the office. He/she must complete all actions on the materials within 120 minutes and must do so without contact with colleagues.

Jr. High Presentation. The participant plans and delivers an oral presentation to a live audience and responds to a standard set of questions from the floor.

Situation: The participant makes an oral presentation to a junior high school audience seeking to convince students and their parents of the wisdom and value of early career planning that will make them competitive for admission to institutions such as West Point upon graduation from high school. The participant has 20 minutes to prepare and 15 minutes to make the presentation. There is a 30-minute question and answer period that follows in which questions that commonly arise at these presentations are asked.

Workbooks

Each of the exercises has an associated workbook which lists the dimensions to be assessed and provides a list of examples of acceptable and unacceptable performance.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This report describes the development of performance-based assessment centers to identify developmental training needs of two types of admissions officers at West Point--Admissions Officers proper and Project Outreach Officers. Effective performance of their duties by admissions officers at the US Military Academy is critical to the continued accession of high quality cadets into that institution. In order that officers selected into the position be fully prepared for those duties, full scale developmental assessment centers were developed and implemented to assess the strengths and weaknesses, in behavioral dimensions important to success, of incoming admissions officers.

Thirteen behavioral dimensions were identified as important for success as an admissions officer; they included dimensions of communication, supervision, decision-making, and technical knowledge. Two sets of job-related exercises were then developed which simulated recurrent situations in the Admissions Officer and Project Outreach Officer job positions, and which would elicit behavior on the important dimensions. Videotapes and workbooks to support assessor training/performance evaluation were also developed. Two assessment centers, one for each type of admissions officer, were conducted; the participants were apprised of the results; and they were provided with individualized development plans to help remediate weaknesses uncovered during the assessment process.

Evaluations of the worth of the assessment programs were obtained from participants, assessors, and the Admissions Office leadership. All rated the programs as valuable adjuncts to admissions officer training but commented on their labor-intensiveness.

A second round of both assessment centers will be conducted in conjunction with the 1982 admission officer training programs. With exercises, workbooks, and assessor training materials already developed, personnel time costs will be greatly reduced.

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